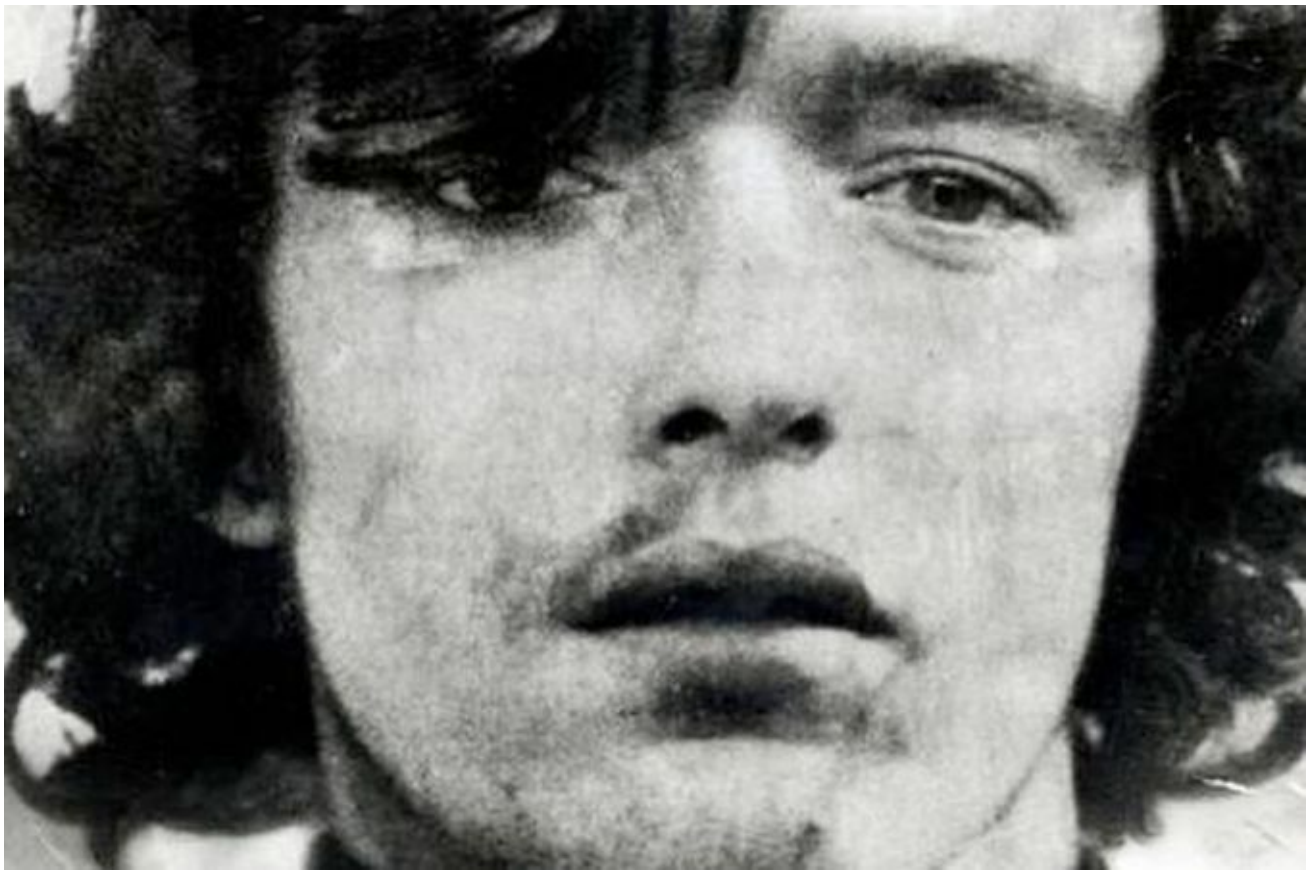
Triple child killer being groomed for release

In 1973, David McGreavy murdered a baby and her two young siblings. They'd never release a man who did something as terrible as that. Would they?



Triple child killer David McGreavy – The Monster Of Worcester.

Last October, the State of South Dakota executed child rapist and murderer Donald Moeller. It took over two decades, but the authorities finally got round to it. Here, they don't do that sort of thing anymore. Earlier this month, Stuart Hazell was given the mandatory life sentence with a 38 year tariff for the murder of Tia Sharp. This means he will almost certainly die in prison. If one child murder means *almost* certainly dying behind bars, then three must mean it for certain. Right?

In 1973, David McGreavy was babysitting for Clive and Dorothy Ralph, with whom he was lodging. When the baby wouldn't stop crying, he killed her. Then he impaled her body on the garden railings along with the bodies of her four year old brother and two year old sister. Even though there was no imputation of a sexual motive, it is difficult to imagine a more horrible crime, and if its perpetrator cannot be executed, then surely he should never be released except perhaps at the age of 105 when he could be wheeled to an ambulance and driven to a hospice to spend his last few days. If only.

McGreavy's killing spree earned him the appellation The Monster Of Worcester. He pleaded guilty to all three murders, and according to the report in the London *Times* for July 31, 1973, the trial judge, Mr Justice Ashworth, told him: "So appalling is the crime and in the doctors' view, which I share, so grave the risk of repetition, that I feel bound to make a recommendation that the minimum period which should elapse before the Secretary of State orders your release on licence is 20 years".

That takes us to 1993, but surely no one, including the trial judge ever envisaged McGreavy being released, after all, a tariff is only a recommended minimum. Fast forward to January 2006, by which time he was domiciled at Ford Open Prison, and was allowed to travel unescorted to Liverpool; he was born at nearby Stockport.

With the abolition of the death penalty, there are realistically only two things to do with life sentence prisoners, who include many murderers. They can either be locked up for life, or at some point they will be released. Prisoners sentenced to shorter, including much shorter terms, are often left to their own devices on release, which is one reason the likes of petty crook Jamie Robery end up doing a life sentence on the instalment plan.

The people who run our criminal justice system are not totally incompetent though, and it has long been the practice for those considered suitable for release to be walked back into society sensibly. This will typically include being moved to a lower category prison, then to an open prison – which is in many ways not a prison at all – being allowed home visits (for those who still have homes), perhaps being moved to a half way house, and finding them accommodation and even a job. This is all very sensible, but only for those who deserve a second chance. While the families and friends of murder victims may find this disdainful, the selectivity of the process ensures that the vast majority of those released on life licence go forth and sin no more. Michael Luvaglio is a successful example of this process, while his co-defendant Dennis Stafford is not. The important word in the above is selectivity, and one can only wonder how and why McGreavy could ever be considered suitable for parole.

The tabloid press got wind of McGreavy's jaunt to Liverpool at the time, probably having been tipped off by someone at the Home Office, or more likely within the prison system. In 2007, then Home Secretary John Reid attempted to block McGreavy's release, but since the European Court decision in the Stafford case, he and successive Home Secretaries have been powerless to overrule the Parole Board.

Four years ago, the courts granted McGreavy anonymity within the prison system for his own protection. That anonymity has now been removed by the High Court thanks to Justice Secretary Chris Grayling and media organisations, in particular the *Daily Mirror*.

This means that, in the short term at least, McGreavy will remain behind bars, but it seems likely that he will some day be released, something that may well irk Denise Fergus, especially when she learns – if she hasn't already – that 14 years after the murder of her son James Bulger, an even more dangerous child killer than Jon Venables has been allowed to walk the streets of Liverpool.

[The above was first published May 24, 2013. In the original, the date of McGreavy's crime was given as 1972; it was actually April, 1973 – Friday the thirteenth. Dorothy Ralph was known by her middle name, Elsie; she would later divorce and remarry, being known as Elsie Urry.]